

February 26, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

The weather this week was fantastic after brutal cold and snow over the last couple of weeks. The timing was good since we are starting a streak of five consecutive 5-day weeks. The athletic programs are roaring right now. The amount of traffic in our gyms almost feels normal, except the relief of finally getting to some sense of normality is overwhelming. I wish I could put the area encompassing our school district in a bubble and shut it off from the rest of the world at times. Many think we do 😊

We received word this week that the state assessments must go on. It has been said that the need for assessments is greater than ever, to see where kids are academically due to COVID. Many districts are struggling to figure out how to reach each student to ensure they are tested in person. We have planned to conduct assessments just as in the past and feel that our district is positioned to shine during this year's "evaluation". Students who remain remote in Highland CUSD No. 5 will be invited to participate in the assessments with our in-person students as required by the State. Students opting to not attend in person will not count against any kind of accountability this year due to the flexibilities extended because of COVID. We are generally required to test 95% of our students.

Now, here is a little foreshadowing on the next couple of paragraphs. If it doesn't apply to you, you may want to skip them because it can be very confusing when trying to read a short synopsis of this phenomena. I plan to give a detailed account of our enrollment numbers next week. I will include the number of students who remain remote as well as the number of students enrolled in person. The fourth quarter decision to be in-person/remote has created some issues for our district. I did a quick look at the requests and it appears we have about 60 requests for changes in learning environment with over 50 of them requesting from remote to in-person.

This process has created a shift in the class sizes at some of the primary and elementary grade levels. We have been forced to look at some kids being placed at Alhambra Primary and Grantfork Elementary when they return to address the "flopping" of class sizes. Because one teacher at each grade level in Highland are responsible for all remote learners in the grade, students return to less sections of that grade level. Now that the number of remote learners in several grade levels is less than the average in-person class-size, we see the in-person class-sizes growing and causing concern. We will be communicating with families of returning students next week to clarify exactly what this is going to look like. Please be patient through this process.

We know that many concerns exist across our country about the politics playing out with the current administration. Good or bad, we do not want to push any kind of government hand-outs on folks who do not wish to access them, but we are dealing with some issues locally that necessitate some intervention. We partner with CERES food service for our cafeteria services. This has been a difficult year to manage COVID and the number of meals being served. We are in the process of increasing the number of meals served by sending home meals for weekends. Students especially in the primary and elementary grades may be provided bagged meals for weekends to address meal counts. We know this may not be the most popular procedure, but we need to survive these COVID times the best we can. I can provide more information on this in future weekly updates if it is necessary to explain.

COVID numbers for the week: Highland Primary reported zero new positive cases and 7 students on quarantine due to outside exposure. Alhambra Primary reported 1 positive student resulting in 3 student quarantines. Highland Elementary reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines with 1 staff awaiting test results. Grantfork Elementary reported zero new positives or quarantines. Highland Middle School reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines. Highland High School reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines.

How's that for a good week! I am so proud of our students, families, and staff for their continued efforts to do what they need to do to ensure our environment is safe for all. Our focus is not just on being here, it is on the quality of instruction and preparing our students for their next step in life, whether it be the next grade level, the next building, college, trade school, or life in general. Oh, I can't believe I am going to coin this phrase, but "It is a great time to be a BULLDOG!"😊😊😊 Together we made it this far, let's keep it going. Things coming up: ½ day dismissal on May 5, daylight saving time starts March 14, Easter on April 4, Administrative Assistant's Day on April 21, HHS graduation on the weekend of May 14, and adjusted last day of school would be May 20 **IF IF IF (emphasis, not typo)** no more snow days.

Thank you all for your continued support and encouragement of Highland CUSD No. 5. Have a wonderful weekend and enjoy the spring-like weather the next couple of days!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent